# TREADGOLDS: THE DEVELOPMENT & DECLINE OF A PORTSEA IRONMONGERS 1800-1988

Ann Day

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**Summary**

*W. H. Treadgold & Company Limited, or Treadgolds as it is more familiarly known to the local community in Portsea, was an ironmongers which traded from the late eighteenth century until its closure in 1988. As a focus for historical study, the significance of Treadgolds is its very ordinariness, its lack of difference from many other enterprises in provincial towns during this period, and it is these elements which provide such a rare example for the historical researcher, especially as the premises have been largely unchanged for a hundred years. The firm of Treadgolds therefore offers a particular insight into the trends of small-scale production and retailing during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the influence such individual enterprises had within the wider sphere of urban development. By exploring and analysing the abundance of documentation found on the premises, together with other local sources, it has been possible to construct a fascinating record of a family which initially, by the luck of inheritance, owned and lived in a small ironmonger's shop, eventually moving to a grand house overlooking the seafront, with its own stables and impressive grounds.*[1]

*Cover:*
*Poster for Treadgold Exhibition*
Photography by Trevor Evans,
Photographic Dept., HCC Museum.

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# Treadgolds: The Development and Decline of a Portsea Ironmongers 1800–1988

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## Introduction

The name of Treadgold has deep resonances within the local Portsea community. Right up until its closure it was still perceived as a family business which served the everyday needs of Portsmouth's inhabitants, despite the fact that much of its retailing style had been outmoded with the arrival of DIY shops. The family itself had not been directly involved with the business since the death in 1947 of the last surviving female member, Miss Beatrice Treadgold, but the notion of a family-run concern still persisted during the following decades. How did this myth develop and become such a deep-rooted conviction? Before exploring this question, we need to understand the general framework within which a firm like Treadgolds developed.

In general, histories of businesses are centred around large enterprises or huge corporations and the dynamic individuals who, through their leadership and innovations, have had a particular impact on their period. Although such history has its place, so too does a study of the smaller, often family-owned firms, such as Treadgolds, which existed both before the arrival of and alongside the larger companies. Because of their proliferation in developing urban areas during the early part of the nineteenth century, these small businesses are perhaps more representative of local economies at this time, and whilst many did not survive, those that did provide an important source for studying the role of the retailer and small producer. Such individuals not only provided a specific service in their direct retailing capacity, but often had an important role as mortgagors and landlords of property. Added to this was the significance of their membership of local organizations, which served to cement both business and social relations. It will be shown that the Treadgold family followed this pattern, from generation to generation, and were typical of many businessmen during the nineteenth century.

Of course, as a dockyard town the development of business and commerce in Portsmouth has been profoundly affected by the demands of Admiralty policy. Any historical account of the town is therefore governed by its relationship with the dockyard, both in the direct employment of large numbers of its inhabitants and, indirectly, by the development of service industries. An overall study of economic and demographic expansion during a particular period of time will show that these were strongly influenced by the level of activity in the dockyard. Thus the time of greatest growth coincided with periods of war, or threat of war, and the need for more ships and rearmament, and an accompanying necessity to expand the dockyard.[2] Overall population growth from the beginning of the nineteenth century until the outbreak of World War One is shown below.

| Date | Population Nos. |
|---|---|
| 1801 | 33,226 |
| 1811 | 40,567 |
| 1821 | 45,648 |
| 1831 | 50,389 |
| 1841 | 50,556 |
| 1851 | 68,969 (36.4% increase) |
| 1861 | 94,828 (37.5% increase) |
| 1871 | 113,595 |
| 1881 | 128,002 |
| 1891 | 159,278 (24.4% increase) |
| 1901 | 186,133 |
| 1914 | 245,827 (over a 200% increase on 1861)[3] |

During the time of the Napoleonic Wars at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Portsea's population had increased rapidly because of greater military and naval activity, bringing with it the need for a larger workforce and consequently the necessity for more trading outlets. Although post-1815 saw a decline in such requirements, the expansion of Portsea's population continued steadily up to the mid-nineteenth century assisted by the continuance of a permanent military garrison in the town. The dockyard itself was further expanded in 1847 with the addition of a large steam basin to accommodate the newly designed steam-propelled ships[4] Further threats of invasion from the French during the century and the Crimean War resulted in increased fortification and more military personnel. All this had a particular effect on the retailing practices and systems of small-scale production in Portsmouth.

Retailing practices during the late eighteenth century and the first part of the nineteenth century were embedded in traditional systems where retailers bought their stock from manufacturers or wholesalers and sold it on through the fixed shop outlet, or small producers made their own goods on the premises to meet local demand. The former group consisted of tradesmen such as grocers, haberdashers and chandlers and the latter of basket-makers, butchers, blacksmiths and cabinet-makers, all catering for the household and personal needs of the local community.[5] A rapid rate of urbanization during this period, stimulated by the needs of industry, meant that a much larger proportion of the population was living in towns and there was an increasing requirement for the services of these small retailers and producers to support the demands of urban life. The first half of the nineteenth century saw little need for competition in retailing and small-scale production where transportation was limited, but from the 1860s rapid and far-reaching changes occurred which influenced the whole concept of shopkeeping; the development of improved transport systems, multiple retailing,

*Outside of Treadgold premises in Bishop Street (photograph taken in 1988).*
Private collection of Mr and Mrs W. Jefferis.

standardization of production and mail-order sales. Of course, these national changes in retailing had a tremendous effect on the local shopkeeper, the result often being the disappearance of many traditional areas of retailing.[6] It is the resilience of some of these smaller businesses in the face of massive competition, especially during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, which needs to be explored in greater depth in order to ascertain the reasons behind their continued existence.

In the case of Treadgolds, the approach to such a project has been helped considerably by the existence of well-kept account books, sales ledgers, job notebooks and day books. together with a number of original deeds, family papers. and various artefacts left on the premises when closed in 1988. From these documents it has been possible to create a picture of the Treadgold business within the context of Portsea's economic development, as well as the way in which it later adapted itself to changing customer demands whilst maintaining its essence as a family-based enterprise serving the needs of the Portsea people. Investigation into Treadgolds' more recent history has been enhanced through the addition of oral and video interviews with past employees, who have provided a vivid account of their day to day working life.

William Treadgold & Company Limited is situated at the east end of Bishop Street, where it joins Portsea's main thoroughfare, Queen Street, giving Treadgolds a very central position in the area. The whole site was purchased from the trustees of the company in July 1988 by Hampshire County Council, with the intention of preserving not only the buildings, but all the remaining records and the artefacts as they were left. Although the actual business is no longer in existence, the buildings have a continuing role to play in Portsmouth's history and are a reminder of a past way of life. Originally Portsea was known as Portsmouth Common and was a 'liberty' of the town of Portsmouth, that is, although it was geographically separate it came under the jurisdiction of the old town. The Common was a farmed area, the land being divided into strips which were mostly rented to individuals.[7] After permission had been given by Queen Anne to build in the area, the population increased rapidly and house building and road developments were based on the original layout of the fields.

Bishop Street was initially called Sea Mill Furlong and was situated in West Dock Field. Part of the site was used as a gravel pit and Queen Street was originally a causeway or bridge over the pits, described in 1736 as Battle Bridge. In 1704 a Henry Seager conveyed to William Gifford, Esquire, of Portsea an area of land in West Dock Field running north and south through Sea Mill Furlong for the sum of £55 7*s*. 6*d*. In 1706, William Gifford conveyed this 1½ acres of land to John Vining, who in 1710 granted the land to John Woodford for £107 10*s*. 0*d*. to 'have and to use for its brick earth' and that William Edge could excavate the north side.[8] In 1736 William Edge settled the land on his daughter, the wife of George Shakespear, citizen and leather seller of London, who laid out upon it the streets from Hanover Street to St James's Street, including Bishop Street.[9]

**The Treadgold connection**

The earliest record connecting the site with the Treadgolds was in 1787 when John Jones (uncle to William Treadgold, the younger) purchased three messuages[10] in Bishop Street.[11] Corroboration of the site's use as business premises is revealed in the Poor Rates Book of 1815,[12] showing John Jones, listed in the Hampshire Directory as a blacksmith,[13] owning rateable property in both Queen Street and Bishop Street:

| | |
|---|---|
| shop in Bishop Street | £8 4*s*. 0*d*. |

The first signs of the expansion of these premises occurs in 1829, when the following entry in the Poor Rates Book is seen:

| | |
|---|---|
| King's Bench Alley | |
| John Treadgold | £4 2*s*. 0*d*. |
| ditto/store in Bishop Street | £12 6*s*. 0*d*. |

King's Bench Alley runs parallel to Bishop Street from Queen Street to Kent Road (see map), and the houses here backed onto each other. John Treadgold was the second son of William Treadgold, the elder, and brother to William, the younger, who had died in 1819, only three years after he had been left the property by his uncle, John Jones. By 1829 it is clear that John had purchased properties in this alley backing onto the Bishop Street shop, thus indicating that by this time the Treadgold family had taken over and expanded the ironmongery businesses in both

# The Treadgold Family Tree

**Portsea**
John Jones (Blacksmith)
47 Queen Street and shop in Bishop Street
d. 23.4.1816

(uncle to **William Treadgold**)

**Gosport**
**William Treadgold** m. Sarah Mellington
23.5.1757 (Holy Trinity, Gosport)

**William** m. Margaret Jones 22.9.1781 (St. Mary's,Portsea)
bap. 19.3.1758
d. 1833

**Robert**
bap. 13.12.1761

**William** m. Sarah Evans 11.12.1812 (Alverstoke)
bap. 7.4.1782 (Portsea)
d. 11.1.1819
(no children)

**John** m. Mary Ann Barber 4.11.1819 (Alverstoke)
bap. 9.11.1788 d. 1865
d. 29.5.1870

**Sarah** m. Richard Barnes 4.10.1823
bap. 4.9.1791
d. 1843
(no children)

**Caroline** m. Edwin Marvin 15.6.1843
bap. 31.12.1820

- Caroline
  bap. 23.5.1844
- Fanny
  bap. 15.7.1847
- Edwin Frederick
  bap. 12.5.1853
- Jessie
  bap. 8.11.1855
- Ada Florence
  bap. 12.7.1860
  d. 1935

**John Jones** m. Mary Ann Devereux 20.11.1845
bap. 28.4.1822 d. 1866
d. 1852

- **John George**
  bap. 19.11.1846
  d. 1911
- **Mary Kate** m. ? (1871)
  bap. 16.8.1849

**William** m. Elizabeth Johnson 10.10.1855 (Bedford)
bap. 1825 d. 1901
d. 5.8.1882

- **Edith Margarett**
  b. 1856
  d. 22.11.1910
- **Dora Elizabeth**
  b. 1856
  d. 30.9.1919
- **Mabel Winifred**
  b. 1859
  d. 28.1.1938
- **Beatrice Helen**
  b. 1861
  d. 22.7.1947
- **William Lancelot** m. Helen Margaret
  b. 1862
  d. 22.12.1923
- **John Aubrey Temple** m. Blanche Marguerite
  b. 1869
  d. 15.4.1941

None of this generation of Treadgold had any children and the family died out

**James Barber**
bap. 5.8.1827

**Mary Ann** m. Frederick Tilley 13.2.1856
bap. 8.10.1829
(no children)

# NEW MAP OF
# PORTSMOUTH,
## *PORTSEA,*
## LANDPORT & SOUTHSEA,

WITH THE DOCK YARD AND PUBLIC ESTABLISHMENTS.

FROM A SPECIAL SURVEY BY R JARMAN

PORTSMOUTH HARBOUR

*Map of Portsea 1858-9 (the grid layout of the roads is based on the original strip field system, where the roads were previously furlongs).*
PCRO PUR 2/10.

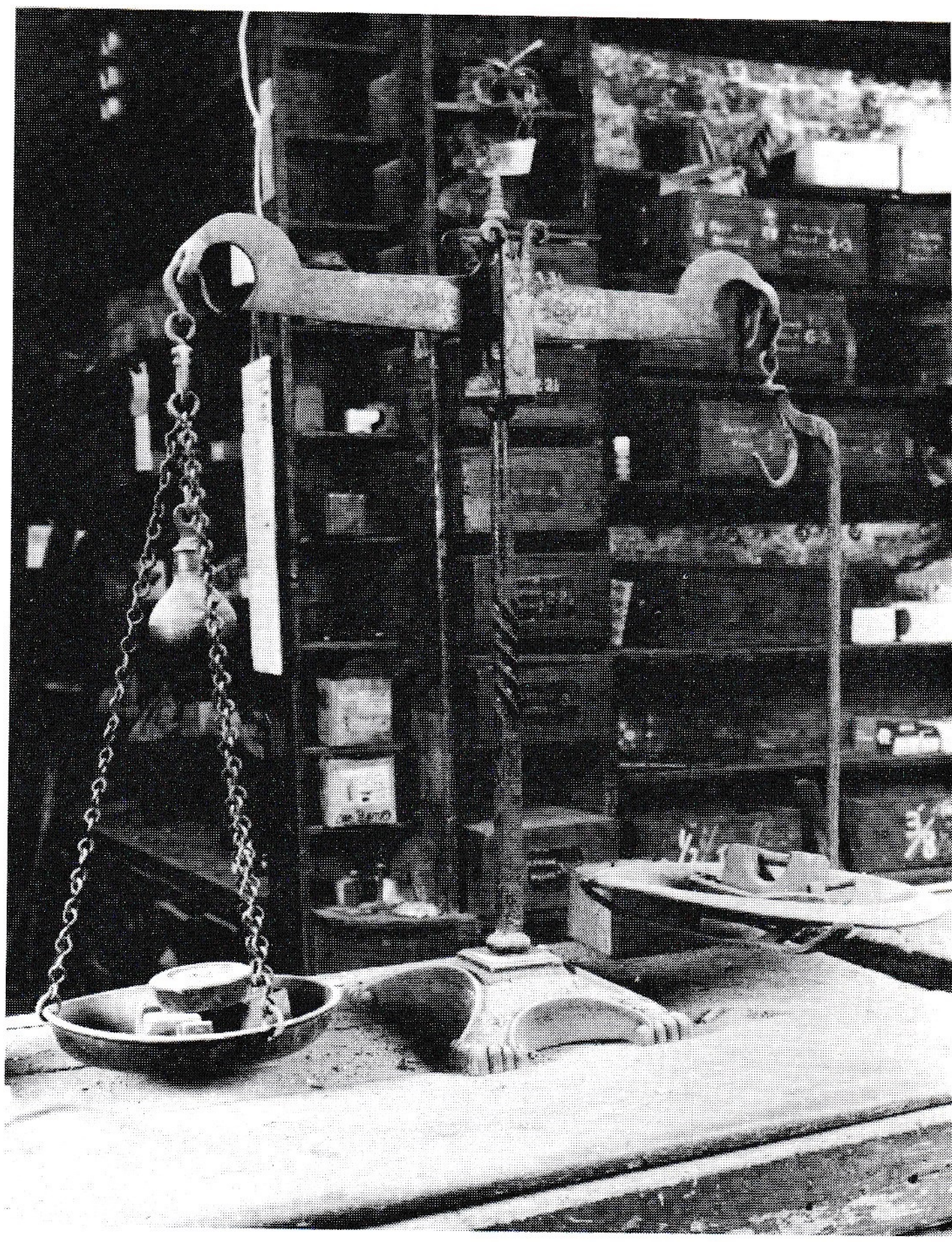
Queen Street and Bishop Street. It is known, again from the Poor Rates Books, and also from architectural evidence, that John Treadgold had a house built for himself and his growing family next to the shop in 1831/32, having by that time produced five children.[14]

Currently the site consists of what was a two-storey shop, a three-storey house (the one referred to above), a warehouse to the rear of the house, a large forge area with double doors which originally opened out onto an alleyway through to Queen Street, and a courtyard leading to the stables. There is also evidence to show that at one time there were three forges on the premises, indicating that this was once a busy workshop and a thriving local business. The whole premises are a conglomeration of old buildings which have had many different uses over the years, creating a labyrinth of open areas, passageways and rooms. At the back of the warehouse area are the remains of an old tenement house, which would originally have been positioned around a common courtyard off King's Bench Alley. With the rapid expansion of Portsea in the mid-nineteenth century, the practice of 'in-filling' became quite common, that is the building of smaller houses on land in between or behind existing houses, usually of poor quality and rented out to working families. The actual buildings are therefore extremely interesting in their complexity, as well as in their somewhat improbable survival, especially during the last war. Whilst much information about their development has been gleaned from the documentation and from visual evidence, assumptions have had to be made where a source is unavailable, but this does not detract from the study of the premises as a way of discovering a style of housing development which reflects the preculiarities of Portsea's expansion during the nineteenth century.

The immedidate sense when first entering the shop area is one of 'stepping back in time'[15], with its musty atmosphere, well-worn shop counter and wooden shelves filled with the paraphernalia of hardware and ironmongery, the old and the new placed together haphazardly creating an impression of timelessness.

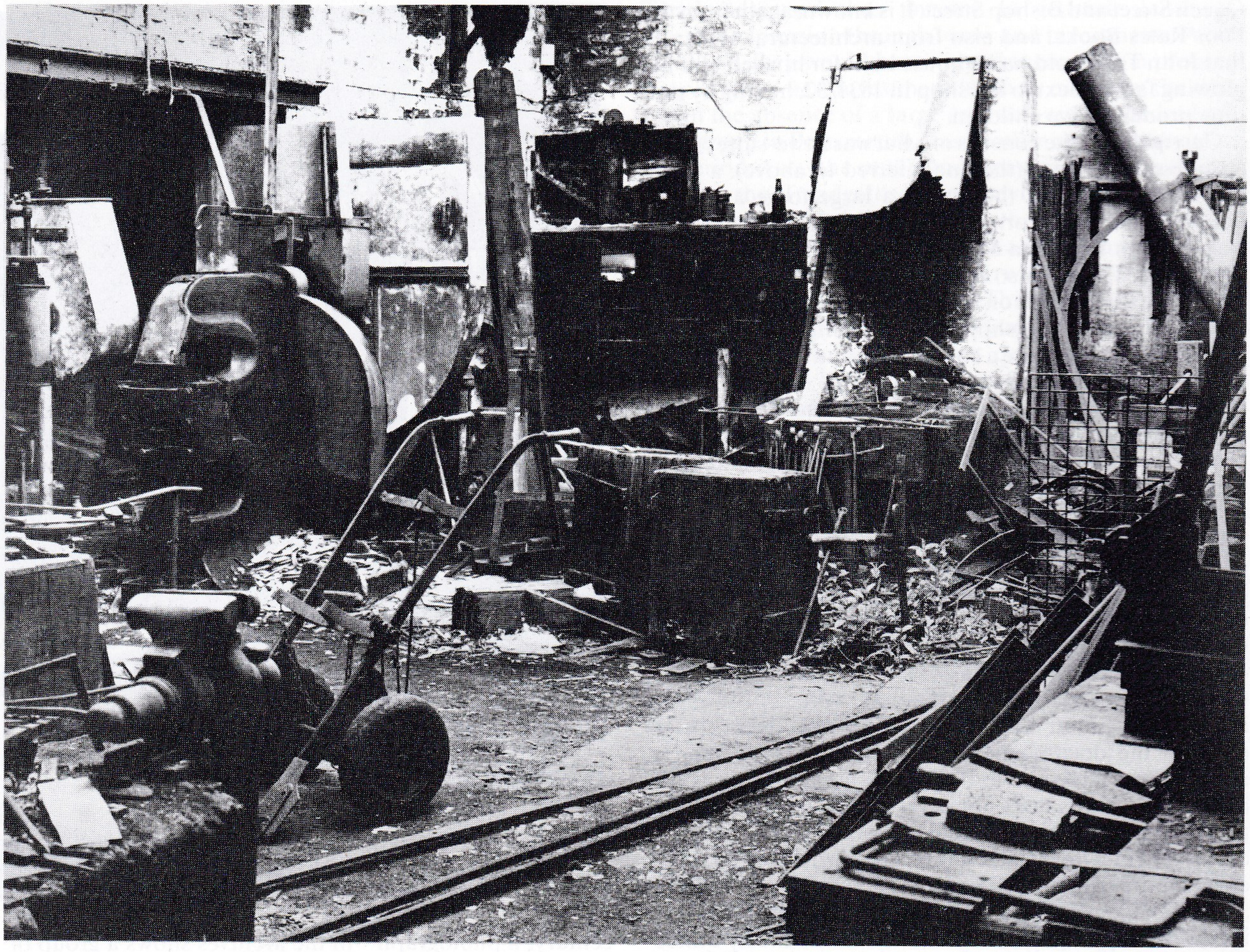
The iron warehouse, built over what was originally the garden behind the main dwelling house, was used for storing the large stock of iron and steel, bars, rods and sheets. These were stacked vertically against iron frames, standing on a sand-covered earth floor and interspersed by wooden walkways built slightly above ground level. The forge area is perhaps one of the most interesting for research purposes, as it contains two working forges, old heavy pieces of machinery for cutting, drilling and punching metal, as well as numerous hand tools used by the blacksmith. This larger machinery is not likely to have been acquired before the earlier part of the twentieth

*Interior of Treadgold shop.*
Trevor Evans, Photographic Department, HCC Museums Service.



century; a photograph[16] in the archives shows a group of men standing around a large iron-bending machine, one of whom has been identified as Jim Croucher (the elder of the two blacksmiths), then aged 16, placing the picture at around 1910. The machine is still on the premises and it is most likely that the photograph was taken at the time of its purchase. Some of the large machinery was belt-driven off a small electric motor, but would originally have been hand-driven; no doubt it was one of the apprentices' job to turn the handle! The experience of working in a busy forge was reconstructed by Bert Burge, who had served his apprenticeship as a blacksmith in Treadgolds, and who recently returned to the site to talk about his working life. One of the remaining forges was fired up and the whole process of making a burglar bar was filmed as part of the research project.[17] The rhythmic thump of the bellows, the ringing of the hammer on the anvil, and the hiss of the fire

*Forge area of Treadgold premises.*
Trevor Evans, Photographic Department, HCC Museums Service.



ringing of the hammer on the anvil, and the hiss of the fire all served to invoke a feeling of what the forge area must have been like when all three forges were working. It was obviously the heart of the Treadgold business and through the video, instead of seeing just a room filled with bits of metal and unrecognisable tools, what can be envisaged is a busy working area where everything had its place.

**Employment and trading patterns**

Evidence for the number of people employed at Treadgolds is sparse for the early part of the nineteenth century. The records contain a sales ledger for 1812-1813[18] which is the earliest account of Treadgolds' customers and the types of goods sold. It is interesting to note that the signatures of both John Jones and William Treadgold appear on the accounts, indicating that they were in business together at the time. Later entries show the signature of W. Treadgold, Jnr, revealing that William's eldest son was brought into the business (he was aged 30 in 1812). Customers' purchases are listed monthly, the lowest being £3 3*s*. 4*d*. for a Mr Foster (a cooper) of Wickham, and the highest amount is £67 8*s*. 6*d*. for Messrs. Geo. Allen & Co., builders, of Portsmouth who received a small discount. Most of the items listed are fairly common to ironmongers at this time, such as flat bars, horse nails, bolts, hoop iron, shovels, swivels, steel bars, and a Spanish hob for a Mr Christopher Miles.

It has to be assumed that up until the 1850s, when a small smithy was added to the premises, the business was concentrated on the retailing of general ironmongery

goods, both in the Queen Street and Bishop Street shops. The 1841 Census Returns list the following details:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Bishop Street | | |
| John Treadgold | age 52 | Ironmonger |
| Mary Treadgold | age 42 | Wife |
| John Treadgold | age 19 | son |
| Caroline Treadgold | age 21 | daughter |
| Mary Treadgold | age 12 | daughter |
| | | |
| Queen Street | | |
| Sarah Treadgold | age 45 | Ironmonger[19] |
| [John Treadgold's widowed sister-in-law] | | |

which seems to bear out this assumption, especially when looking at the 1851 Census Returns, showing:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Bishop Street | | |
| John Jones Treadgold | age 29 | Ironmonger & Smith employing 10 men[20] |

John Jones Treadgold, son of John and Mary and grandson of William (the elder) and Margaret (née Jones, sister of John Jones who left the two shops to the Treadgold family) was involved with the business until his premature death in 1852 and there was an obvious expansion of the premises in the decade up to 1851. John Jones also took over the Queen Street ironmonger's business when his aunt, Sarah, died in 1845 and it is probably at this time that the smithy was built with access through an alleyway from Queen Street to the back of the Bishop Street shop.

A survey of Kelly's directories for the nineteenth century reveals that in the earlier part of the century there were numerous other small ironmongers and blacksmiths in Portsea, so that when the Treadgold family inherited the Queen Street shop in 1816, they were entering a market with a wide local demand. In the *Hampshire Directory* of 1784, there are listed eight blacksmiths and four ironmongers. By 1852[21] there were nine ironmongers, but still eight blacksmiths listed in the Portsea district, mostly centred around the Queen Street and Kent Street areas. It may have been in the face of such increasing competition that John Jones decided to expand the business and include a smithy for forge work as part of the service provided. The Portsea streets in 1852 were hives of local trades and businesses; there were forty-six boot and shoe makers, thirty-one butchers (many with their own slaughterhouses), twenty-four linen and woollen drapers, twenty-eight bakers, twenty-four milliners and dressmakers, twenty-five grocers and tea dealers plus forty-three general grocers, ninety beer retailers and eighty inns and public houses, ten of which were on The Hard and sixteen in Queen Street! This gives some idea of the local economy, which was based on thriving localized and specialist retailing outlets coupled with a long-standing tradition of small-scale production meeting the needs of the community, many of whom worked in the dockyard. In 1886 three of the blacksmiths were listed as 'government dockyard', all located in Cumberland Street which was adjacent to the dockyard. By the end of the century, there were only four ironmongers listed, and by this time Treadgolds are entered as iron and steel merchants, the only ones so defined.

It was William, the second son of the family, who took the business a stage further, developing it considerably into a company which became known and respected throughout the Portsmouth area. As a young man he had been apprenticed to an ironmonger's in Chertsey, Surrey, and returned to Portsmouth in 1844 at the age of 19 to work with his father as an assistant clerk[22] This was not an unusual practice during the nineteenth century, especially for younger sons, and would have provided William with a good grounding in business activities, which he obviously put to practical use when he later took over the Treadgold business. The increase in numbers employed by the company from the 1850s supports other evidence showing that William Treadgold expanded the business during the 1860s, adding the large forge workshop and a warehouse area, which were built over what had been the garden of the Treadgold house. By this time William and his family had moved to 355 Commercial Road, in Landport, and the house in Bishop Street was occupied for a time by a caretaker. From the late nineteenth century it was used as an office with storage rooms above. William also acquired the warehouse opposite the main Treadgold shop in 1861.[23] The 1857 *South Hants & Isle of Wight Directory* contains an advertisement for William Treadgold in which he proclaims himself as sole agent for 'Milner's Holdfast and Fire Resisting Safes and Chests. A large Assortment at his Warehouse'. This is obviously why he needed extra space in order to display an expanded range of items as well as maintaining his other stock.

Interestingly, the definition of an ironmonger changed subtly during the nineteenth century. In the earlier period an ironmongery shop would have been expected not only to provide the bulk of household goods, both for inside and outside use, but to make, install, modify, maintain and repair numerous items in everyday use.[24] When such services had been largely replaced by methods of mass production emanating from the introduction of new technologies, some ironmongers focused on iron and steel stockholding in order to meet the needs of the building trade, as well as adapting to the demands for urban

*Treadgold warehouse on east side of Bishop Street c.1910.*
PCRO 1057A/1/121.

sanitation and improved housing. These changes can be clearly followed through the way in which Treadgolds advertised their services in the trade directories. In Kelly's 1824 *Directory*, the business is listed as, 'John Treadgold & Son, ironmongers', whereas in 1857[25] an advertisement reveals a much wider range of services and by 1886 the listing in Kelly's *Directory* is even more expansive.

> TREADGOLD & CO.—iron, steel, tin plate, iron girder and metal merchant, general ironmonger, agent for Milner's fireproof safes and boxes, Bishop Street.

It is evident from this that John Treadgold, 'Ironmonger', was quite different from William Treadgold, 'Ironmerchant', and that the company had grown quite considerably between the early and late nineteenth century.

The enlargement of the Treadgold premises in the mid-nineteenth century can also be related to the huge expansion of the dockyard during the 1860s to accommodate the new iron-clad ships. Again the population increased drastically and there were obviously much wider opportunities for the Treadgold business. The range of goods being sold, the level of work carried out and the various types of customers during this period can be defined from the 1866 day book.[26] The majority of the customers were Portsea traders, including local builders, such as G. Absalom of Kent Street and the Bramble Brothers of Portland Street, one of the biggest building companies in the town; also brewers such as Pike & Co. and John Cox of Eagle Brewery. On 3 January 1866, there is an entry for G. Smith & Co. and an accompanying reference to the dockyard extension for which this company (another valuable customer) and Bramble Brothers were both contractors (Benjamin Bramble was mayor of Portsmouth four times). A typical entry in the day book shows the types of items being sold at this time:

> <u>Saturday, January 6th 1866</u>
> Perforated zinc
> 8′ vulcanised rubber tube 12/-
> 69 3/8″ holes punched } (forge work)
> 65 1/4″ holes punched }
> Sash fasteners
> 6″ neck bolts
> Warding file
> 5 bridle hooks
> 1 rasp 1/6
> 3 3/8″ slow burners
> 40 fish tail jets
> ½″ frame pulleys
> plough pins
> 1 No.3 damper
> coopers rivets
> shutter knobs
> 1 26″ Range (priced at one pound, four shillings)

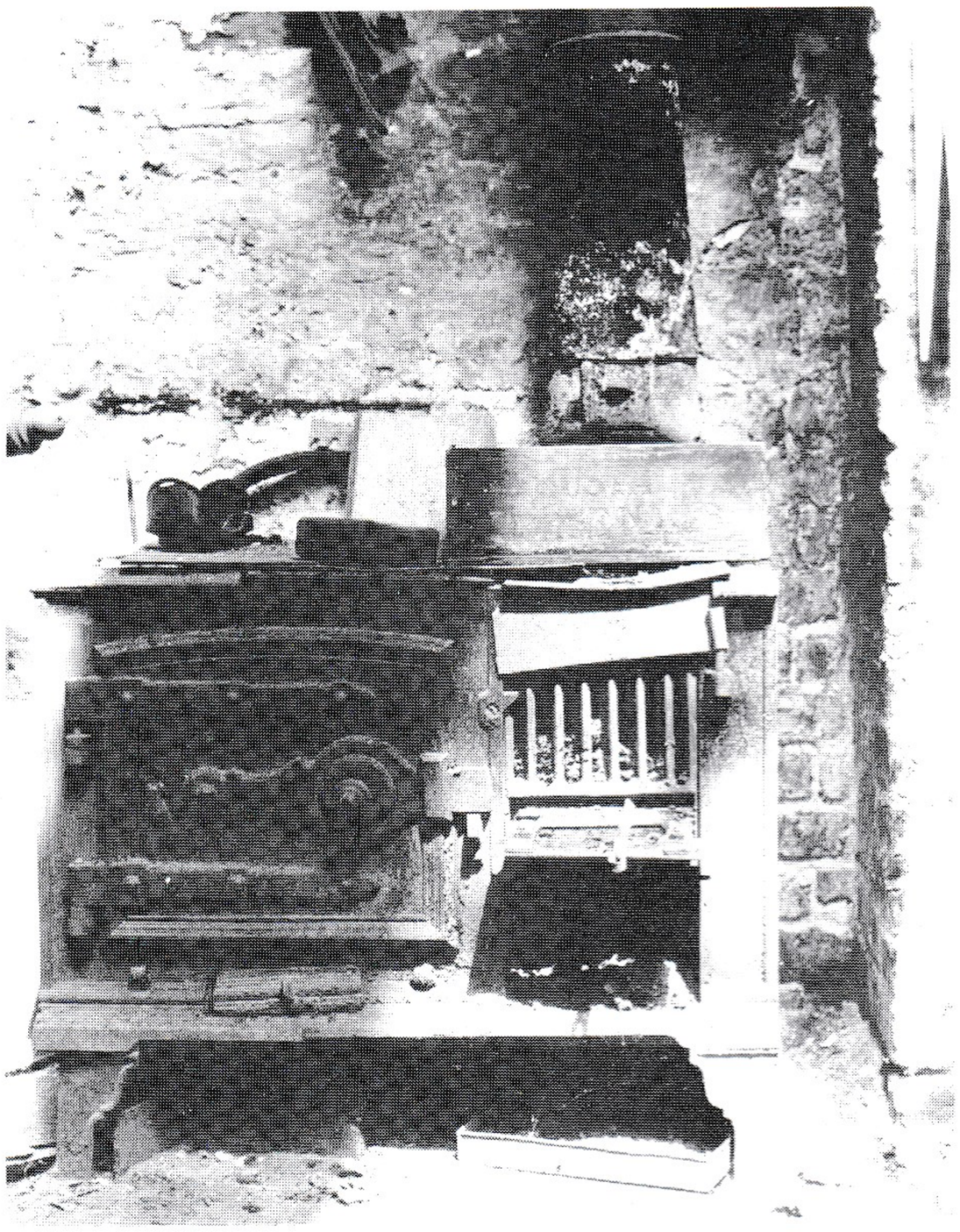
Further analysis shows that a large proportion of Treadgolds' trade was the supply of goods to government contractors, a lucrative area of trade during such times of expansion. They also stocked iron for making horse shoes, horse shoe nails and frost studs, together with various farrier's tools for the local blacksmiths. Another sphere of customer demand was in agricultural implements and the carrying out of work for the estates and farms around Portsmouth; their main suppliers were James, Isaac & John Fussell Ltd. The Thistlewaytes, large landowners in Southwick, feature frequently as customers. Most of the items sold in the shop can be classified under general ironmongery, including a range of domestic goods, such as pails and cooking pots, as well as various building paraphernalia. They also sold wall ties, mosaics and hearth tiles, supplied by Carter & Co. Jonathan Croad, another

*Treadgold employees c.1870s (when compared with the 1988 photograph, it can be seen that the exterior of the premises has changed very little).*
PCRO 1057A/1/121.

local builder, obtained his supplies from Treadgolds and a sales ledger of 1866 records that they ordered materials practically every day and paid a total of £46 2*s*. 10½*d*. for ironmongery in that year. Most of the material is for guttering and also door furniture, roofing felt and sash weights and there are several orders for ornamental panels to be specially cut. Ironmongery constituted an average of 20-30% of the firm's yearly expenditure on supplies and is indicative of the level of business carried on by Treadgolds for the building trade.[27] Although the retailing side of Treadgolds had not changed very much during the first half of the nineteenth century, the business expanded by increasing its range of services. With the addition of a forge area and warehouse, the company was able to carry out a lot more contract work and to stock much larger and specialised items, like the Larbert ranges and Milner safes.

Looking at the latter part of the nineteenth century, a photograph taken *c*. 1870[28] provides good evidence of who was employed in Treadgolds during this period. There are twenty people in total in the photograph, although this in itself is not indicative of permanent staff levels at this time, as it was not uncommon for ironmongers to use itinerant blacksmiths during busy periods. The men wearing leather aprons and shirt sleeves (five altogether) would have been working in the forge area as blacksmiths and apprentices. There is evidence from artifacts found, the layout of the forge area, and oral accounts, that at one time Treadgolds

*Larbert range in Treadgold forge area.*
Trevor Evans, Photographic Department, HCC Museums Service.



had three working forges, in which case it would have been necessary to employ three blacksmiths and two to three apprentices. The man at the left-hand side of the photograph could well have been employed as the carter, perhaps accompanied by one of the young male apprentices. It is known from the records that Treadgolds used a horse and cart up to 1947 for delivering their goods locally. There are also four young boys shown in the photograph, two in suits, who were most likely to have worked in the shop and storeroom areas. The two men in bowler hats (known as 'blockers') would also have worked in the shop as managers or storemen. The three men leaning out of the upstairs windows were obviously office staff, as the room over the shop was used as an office after the Treadgold family moved out in the late 1850s. It is possible that one of these men was William Treadgold, who would have been in his forties at this time.

A work book dated 1874-75,[29] which was found on the Treadgold premises, lists the names of Treadgold customers at this time, some of whom also appeared in the 1866 day book, thus indicating a continuity in types of customers and the ability to meet their needs. One of the biggest contracts during this particular year was with the Royal Naval Club in Old Portsmouth. Treadgolds carried out extensive pipe-fitting work, mainly gas and hot water pipes. The extent of the work can be measured by the number of blacksmiths involved; Purse, Hoar, Sponder and Joe are all detailed as carrying out various forms of work on this project. The company was also involved in supplying and installing steam fittings for the Royal Portsmouth, Portsea and Gosport Hospital, where William Treadgold was a member of the Management Committee. Purse, the blacksmith, also carried out some work for the Treadgold family on 'heating apparatus', beginning in June 1875 and finishing a month later. As the work also involved the making of bolts and shackles, it can be assumed that this was some system of heating for their house in Southsea, to which they had moved in 1872. Another smith, Rees, appears to have been the company's tinsmith at this time. From January to June 1874 he carried out the following work:

Making 2 strong sq tin boxes [for National Provincial Bank]
Rep of reclining coal shute
Making fin steamer
Making iron can
Rep copper fumigator
Making tin blower
Making tin dish
Making 2 tin dishes

There was also a considerable amount of repair work carried out by the smiths during the 1874-75 period, such as repairs to perambulators, lawnmowers, tools and cooking ranges. The age of 'disposable' goods had not yet arrived and repair work was an essential element in the Treadgold trading practices. The extent to which the business had expanded from the 1860s well into the 1870s is illustrated from an indenture dated 1 November 1873 relating to a thirty-year lease for Numbers 13 and 14 White's Row in Portsea (see map), made between the Reverend Godfrey Bolles Lee, Warden of Saint Mary College of Winchester and the scholars and clerks of the same college of the one part, and William Treadgold of Portsea, iron merchant, of the other part.[30] These premises consisted of 'two messuages or tenements with the yards outlets and appurtenances..... and also all that tenement or store formerly a Blacksmith's Shop adjoining southward to the said messuages and premises'. Not only had the rate of William's business expanded to such an extent that he needed extra space, but clearly a competing blacksmith's shop had gone out of business.

The smith's job books[31] from the early part of the

twentieth century show a lot of work on Larbert ranges. There is reference as well to the making of baking tins and bread racks for Boyce, a local baker's wholesaler. During the 1918-23 period, Treadgolds called upon a wide range of suppliers for all the items used in the forge area and general retailing of such items as screws, nails, wire bolts, washers and nuts. They ordered every month and obviously had a vigorous turnover of business, both as wholesalers to local building companies as well as in the direct retailing side and customised work. The orders for pipes, flanges, elbows, sockets, bends and tubes related specifically to 'galvanised gas, galvanised water and steam' showing clearly that they provided the necessary equipment for drainage, sewerage waste and the fitting of gas and steam pipes. An Act had been passed in 1869 enabling individual buildings in Portsea to be connected up to a main drainage system and William Treadgold had applied for this facility for the Bishop Street premises in 1871. New technologies in building materials and the mass production of pipes by the early twentieth century had facilitated the expansion of this process to all parts of Portsmouth, providing Treadgolds with another profitable area of trade.

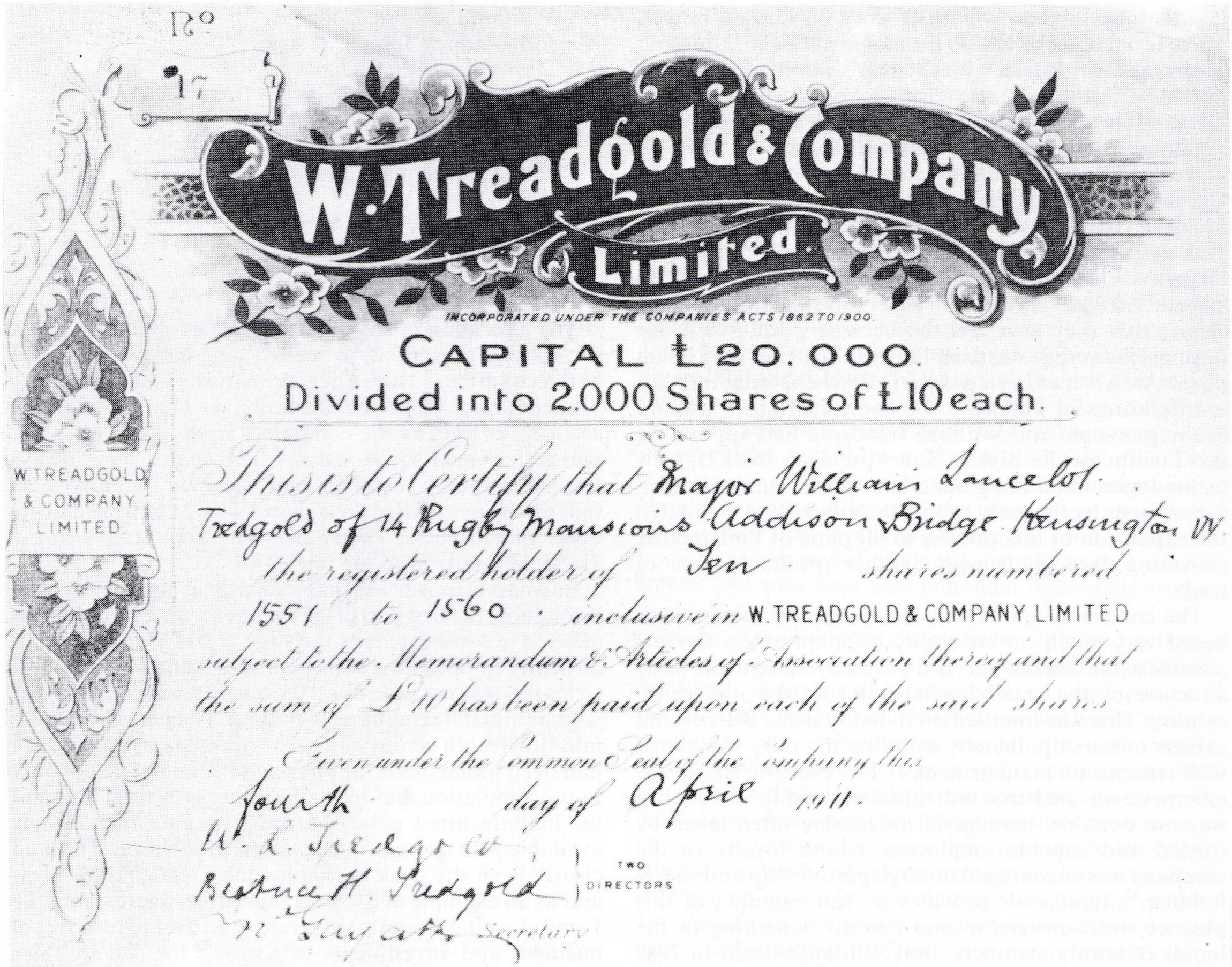
The continuance of small-scale, local production was based very much on an ability to adapt and a flexible attitude to the market. Survival was also related to the basic structure of the small business during the nineteenth century. This was founded on individualistic activity and private ownership, thereby avoiding the risks associated with reliance on management. If, however, the size of the enterprise was such that individual ownership and control was not possible, managerial roles were often taken by trusted and capable employees, whose loyalty to the company was encouraged through partnership and shareholding.[32] Treadgolds provides a clear example of this practice, with ownership and control remaining in the hands of family members until William's death in 1882 necessitated the employment of a general manager, at this time John Guyatt, to run the business on behalf of William's widow, Elizabeth, and her six children. The family name had by this time been changed to Tredgold, and it is possible to surmise that this was part of the process of disassociation, both socially and geographically, from the business of Treadgold, the ironmongers. When Elizabeth died in 1902, it was decided to make the business a private company, achieved by selling it to William Tredgold (the eldest son) and John Guyatt with the other family members acting as shareholders, a common business practice.[33] Wm Treadgold & Company Limited (as it was re-named) had a nominal capital of £20,000 divided into 2000 shares at £10 each. Of the total shares 1560 were allocated as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| William Lancelot Tredgold | 255 |
| John Aubrey Temple Tredgold | 260 |
| Dora Elizabeth Tredgold | 230 |
| Edith Margaret Tredgold | 230 |
| Mabel Winifred Tredgold | 230 |
| Beatrice Helen Tredgold | 230 |
| John Guyatt, man. director | 100 |
| Alfred Hollis, clerk | 10 |
| George Dovey, salesman | 7 |
| Arthur Budden, salesman | 5 |
| George Purse, foreman | 3 [34] |

The allocation of shares to employees obviously had a two-fold purpose; firstly to 'reward' long-term employment and secondly, to ensure a degree of loyalty to the company. Shareholding also provided an enhanced level of financial security, as long as the company's trading was buoyant, and an elevated social status.[35] The shares were always limited to family members and specified employees, so that when anyone died their shares were re-allocated to the other shareholders. The shares were kept largely in the Tredgold family until the late 1940s.[36]

Business turnover was maintained at a fairly steady level throughout the first part of the twentieth century and whilst affected to some extent by the First World War because of difficulty in obtaining iron and steel supplies, in overall terms this was not severe and the business survived the war with minimal fluctuations in trading. The period from the mid-nineteenth century up to the outbreak of war in 1914 had been momentous for phenomenal increases not only in the population, but in the resulting growth of demand for manufactured goods as these became increasingly available with new methods of mass production. This had clearly been the peak period for the Treadgold business and as an example of the level of income, figures from the Family Capital Account ledger show an overall turnover of business and investments of £36,602 16*s*. 7*d*. in 1896, £36,795 7*s*. 4*d*. in 1897 and £37,489 5*s*. 3*d*. in 1898, approximately £28,000 of which came from property and investment (including £10,000 mortgages on house property).[37] It was the aftermath of the First World War that led to a depletion of businesses in general since much of the later decline in the local economy was linked to a dwindling of dockyard employment with a decrease in demand for warship building in the early 1920s. The growth of other commercial centres in Portsmouth, such as Landport and Southsea, resulted in an exodus of Portsea's population and a resultant decline in local business. The minutes of the directors' meeting dated 9 May 1905[38] noted that trading was down because of competition 'in the Town', but the idea of opening another branch of the business in Commercial Road was not discussed until a further

*Share certificate of Wm Treadgold & Co. Ltd, 1911.*
PCRO 1057A/1/14.




meeting on 4 May 1911, although nothing further ensued. By the 1920s, Treadgolds had only two blacksmiths and one or two apprentices working for them. A stock book dated 1923-39 shows that they were still providing many general ironmongery goods, such as iron bars and plate, pipes and pipe fittings, brass and copper tube, cowls for chimneys, many domestic items like kettles, pails and earth buckets; they still also stocked items for the agricultural market such as hay rakes, and pig troughs. However, although the range of stock appears much the same from 1923 to 1939, the main bulk of their business was in the supply of iron and steel bars, plate, girders, sheets and hoops.

For the Second World War period, the levels of profit on trading show a rise from 1939 to 1943, dropping in 1944 and 1945 then rising again from 1946.[39] This initial rise can be partly explained by an increase in the value of stock, especially iron and steel goods as raw materials became scarce, so that the selling-on price would have risen on existing stock. The annual sales figure remained much the same during the war years; £10,744 in 1940, down to £9,838 in 1941, up to £10,588 in 1942 and down slightly to £9,978 in 1943. An indication of their level of business can be seen when comparison is made with the sales figures of A.H. Barber, ironmongers in Albert Road, Southsea[40] which were nearly half those of Treadgolds at the beginning of the

war; £4,403 in 1940 and £5,761 in 1941, but rising to £7,165 in 1942 and £8,454 in 1943. These latter rises reveal a more buoyant trading pattern for Barber's, but also that Treadgolds by comparison had a very consistent level of sales.

The post-war period saw Portsmouth City Council looking at alternatives to reliance on the dockyard economy and encouraging other industries into the area. By the 1950s there were definite signs of change in the local economy with the relocation of outside manufacturing companies in the Portsmouth area. Whilst dockyard employment continued to remain dominant, its post-war decline was compensated to some extent by these new industries and also by an increase in tourism in Southsea.[41] The economic decline that has characterised Portsea since 1945 was due in part to the massive relocation schemes for local residents who had been bombed out during the war. New housing estates were built in Leigh Park and Wymering, on the outskirts of Portsmouth, to where many Portsea people were moved and this obviously had an adverse effect on old trading patterns, as can be seen in the case of Treadgolds. By 1964, the total staff at Treadgolds had been reduced to eleven, including the managing director, Mr Jefferis, and two semi-retired blacksmiths. One of these employees was John Hewett, who worked in the shop for 34 years. He was born at No. 6 Bishop Street and he remembers the Treadgold horse and cart; there were two horses, Dick and Judy, and as a child he used to ride on the cart with Freddie Thompson, the driver, later replaced by Joe Tyrell. John joined Treadgolds in 1953 as a shop porter, after he finished his National Service. When the horse and cart were replaced by a 3-ton Bedford lorry, John used to drive this delivering goods in and around the Portsmouth district. As trade declined, the lorry was used only twice a week and eventually the delivery service was no longer required and the lorry was sold. When John first started at Treadgolds, it was still a busy company providing for the needs of the local community, which by this time included the Commercial Road area:

> To be honest, I don't think there was any firm in the town we didn't deal with, even Marks & Spencer, C & A and people like that, they used to come down for burglar bars, any amount of things. All the iron girders in all the pubs and big buildings came from Treadgolds, and I delivered them![42]

John confirmed that the blacksmiths were what he called of 'the old school', and very conscientious in their style of work. He worked mostly with Bill Jefferis helping with stock-taking and ordering supplies.

Further information about working in a small forge can be ascertained from the various interviews conducted with Albert Burge, employed as a blacksmith with Treadgolds for nearly ten years. Bert started work at Treadgolds in 1947 at the age of 14. He was employed initially as a shop-boy and an apprentice blacksmith under the tutelage of his father, who had worked for the company since 1919. Albert Snr had been apprenticed in turn to Jim Croucher, who had also started with the company as a young boy and both men continued work with the company until old age and eventual retirement.

When asked what work was carried out, Bert replied,

> They made all kinds of things, girders, burglar bars, brackets, anything in the steel line, and mostly for local builders or contractors. They did the girders for Woolworth's and Bishop Brothers in the town centre. There was a fair amount of work being done at that time.[43]

According to Bert, the company never modernized in his time there and any machinery introduced was always bought second-hand. Most of the work was done manually and Bert had to cut the iron girders with a hacksaw, filing off to make them square. His father was a perfectionist – 'nothing would go out of that workshop unless it was right ..... and no job ever came back'. Bert's first wages as an apprentice were £2 10*s*. 0*d*. a week and his father earned only £4 10*s*. 0*d*. in 1947. There were also two bonuses a year, paid in August and at Christmas, but the wages were still low in comparison to the general rate. Much of the work carried out was for local builders, like Howe & Bishop and Barnes & Elliott, who were involved in the post-war reconstruction work. Bert eventually left the company in the late 1950s because he was offered a job at McKinney's on the Fratton Industrial Estate at £17 15*s*. 0*d*. per week, £4 more than he had been earning at Treadgolds when he left. He enjoyed his time at Treadgolds because the pace of work was much slower and this gave him time to do his work properly. Mr Frederick Cobb was the general manager there then and he generally left the men to get on with the work in their own time.

Fred Cobb's agreement for employment as general manager with Treadgold & Co., made in 1948,[44] was based on a fixed salary of ten guineas per week plus a bonus of 5% for the first £500 of profit made by the company in excess of £1,000. Four weeks' holiday a year were agreed, but he was not allowed to hold shares in any other company without permission of the board. Mr Cobb had his own office at the back of the general office in what was originally the Treadgold house. It is perhaps this office area that best epitomises the somewhat Dickensian ambience of the whole premises with the high, sloping mahogany desks, the Milner iron safe and three old-style speaking tubes.[45]

*Interior of Treadgold office.*
Private collection of Mr and Mrs W Jefferis.

Mr Cobb's back office had originally contained a Georgian table and set of chairs as well as an old grandfather clock and it was here that the monthly directors' meetings were held. The records show that Treadgolds became a limited company in 1902, with William Tredgold as the chairman and the other five children of William and Elizabeth (who had died in 1901) were members of the committee. The family were no longer involved in the day-to-day running of the business, but attended the monthly directors' meetings and drew an agreed dividend every year after the Annual General Meeting in May. After Mr Guyatt's death, Mr Alfred Hollis (who had previously been a salesman with the company) was appointed as manager, until he died in 1923, when he was replaced by Frederick Cobb.

The manager of the company was responsible for its overall administration, including supplies, customer accounts, wages and employment. Bill Jefferis, the last general manager, had come to Treadgolds when he married Mary, Frederick Cobb's daughter. They had met in the Air Force and Mr Jefferis eventually replaced Mr Cobb as manager when the latter died in 1961. Mary Jefferis stresses the role of Treadgolds as a specifically family business with a sense of responsibility for its employees.

> It was a family business and it carried on in that fashion. No one ever got sacked unless they really deserved it, pinching or something like that.[46]

She herself worked for the company in its later years, assisting in the office administration with Marian Way, secretary from 1923 until her death in the 1980s. Mrs Jefferis recalls the time when her mother was ill and Miss Beatrice Tredgold sent her a dressing gown and fruit to help in her recovery. Bill and Mary Jefferis were both directors of the company and trustees after the death of Beatrice (the last member of the Treadgold family) in 1947.

They became trustees of the company, together with Mrs Edna Robinson, widow of Eric Robinson the company's solicitor. It was the joint decision of the three trustees to sell the entire premises and all the contents to Hampshire County Council in 1988.

In summary, it can be seen that the essence of Treadgolds during the twentieth century was its continuing perception by its customers in the local community as a 'family' business, well after the last members of the family had died. To some extent this was achieved through a style of 'paternalistic' management by which the Treadgolds had mediated their own system of values and business practices. This was facilitated by the employment of loyal managerial staff, who in turn related on the same basis with the other employees under their charge. It was this element of long and loyal service that must have contributed to Treadgolds' continuance by providing a secure base for the business. More pragmatically, through the need for re-building Portsmouth's housing after the Second World War and the expansion of retailing outlets, Treadgolds was able to keep pace with the demands of a changing market, albeit a considerably smaller one than it had experienced during the previous hundred years. The decline of the business was therefore a gradual process over the course of the twentieth century, linked not only to an increasingly outdated style of business, but also to external forces. Changing retail patterns were obviously influential in the process of decline, with large department stores now stocking most of the domestic items previously sold in smaller shops. Added to this was the increasing popularity of home improvement after World War Two and the introduction of multinational DIY stores capable of undercutting prices and providing a greater diversification of goods through bulk buying.[47] Whilst the use of pre-packaging and proprietary goods undermined the traditional small retailer, ironically it was this standardisation of goods that acted as an advantage to Treadgolds in their continued ability both to provide old types of specialised stock and to sell individual items, especially such things as bolts, nails and screws. However, an adverse effect on trading for Treadgolds was its location in Portsea, increasingly distant from Portsmouth's main commercial area in Landport.

Other reasons for the decline have been put forward by some of the interviewees. Mrs Robinson points to the steel strikes in 1971, during which iron and steel supplies had apparently to be purchased from abroad, especially Belgium and Germany. In her opinion, although Treadgolds did buy some of their supplies from these new sources, they never recovered totally from this period in terms of stock-piling and the result was a reduction in their level of turnover.[48] However, this cannot be taken as the total reason for decline, because even with a large stock of materials, there still has to be a high degree of customer demand and, clearly, this was diminishing during the 1960s and 70s. Another reason put forward is the intrusion of large building companies during the post-war period. Such companies as Trollope & Cole, a London firm, were involved in the massive rebuilding work after the war, including the shopping centre in Commercial Road. Another building company, Kirk & Kirk, built the housing estates at Paulsgrove.[49] Despite this, there was still room during the immediate post-war period for some of the small local builders, such as Privett's who carried out building work on schools, and Salter's who specialised in church buildings. During the 1950s Treadgolds remained a busy company, dealing with nearly all the businesses in Portsmouth, providing shop fittings, fittings for pubs, and builders' materials. Some of the work was specific to customers' demands, but mainly on a small scale basis. This is borne out by the paperwork found in the forge office showing drawings and templates from various jobs to be done by the blacksmiths, mostly of a minor nature.

Mrs Jefferis placed the long survival of Treadgolds on their reputation for reliability and the provision of a customer-specific service. She suggests that the business was gradually 'squeezed out' by alternative styles of retailing coupled with the introduction of new techniques in welding, precluding the need for the old blacksmith's craft. The final decision to close the business was at the time the new business rate was introduced, when it was felt that trading was no longer a plausible option. In summary, the reason for decline cannot be seen as from just one cause, but an accumulation of factors over a period of time and the final decision of the shareholders to cease trading in a business that was no longer willing to adapt itself to the new market.

**The Treadgold Family**

In looking at the history of the Treadgold business, it becomes obvious that it could not have gained the level of success that it did during the nineteenth century without the close involvement and dynamism of key members of the Treadgold family. From the various records available locally, it has been possible to trace the Portsea branch of the Treadgolds from 1757. They lived originally in Gosport and the earliest record found shows the marriage of William Treadgold to Sarah Mellington at Holy Trinity Church in Alverstoke on 23 May 1757. This William Treadgold is referred to as a cabinetmaker[50] in the documentation available and it is through his son, William, and his marriage in 1781 to Margaret Jones, that a connection is found with Portsea and the ironmongery business.

It was William's second son, John Treadgold, who

*Marriage certificate of William and Elizabeth Treadgold.*
General Register Office, St Catherine's House, London.

CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF MARRIAGE

1855. Marriage solemnized at the Parish Church in the Parish of St Lawrence Reading in the County of Berks

| No. | When Married. | Name and Surname. | Age. | Condition. | Rank or Profession. | Residence at the time of Marriage | Father's Name and Surname. | Rank or Profession of Father. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 443 | October 10 | William Treadgold | Full age | Bachelor | Iron Merchant | Portsea | John Treadgold | Iron Merchant |
| | | Elizabeth Johnson | Full age | Spinster | | King St. Reading | George James Johnson | Bookseller |

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church, by Licence, or after by me,

This Marriage was solemnized between us, William Treadgold, Elizabeth Johnson, in the Presence of us, Geo Jas Johnson, Annie Watkins, Mary Ann Treadgold, William Lester.

GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE ENGLAND

stimulated the build-up of the business from a small retailing ironmongers in the early 1800s to the thriving enterprise that he sold on to his son William in 1856. It was of course the first William who provided the necessary capital and who also laid the foundation for the family ethos of business enterprise and security through sound investment. It is perhaps particularly through the process of provision for dependents that the development of financial organizations to facilitate long-term security can best be viewed. The wills of John Treadgold, and later his son William, reveal the way that the finances were kept firmly within the family, whilst providing the foundation for further development through astute forms of investment. Four of the wills which are available from the Treadgold family records, spanning a period of some one hundred and fifty years and incorporating three generations, reveal a pattern of property ownership both through acquisition and inheritance. It becomes apparent from a study of the wills that ownership of property was considered a strong form of security as well as acting as a cornerstone of middle class values and social status, especially during the early part of the nineteenth century when this particular group was consolidating its position in the social structure. Obviously the actual possession of wealth in business terms was also seen as a consideration, but its manifestation in land and buildings was central to the Treadgolds' sense of stability. The marriage patterns are significant for the Treadgold family in relation to the gradual strengthening of their social and business activities. John Treadgold's two daughters married local tradesmen and his sons also married within their own social circle. John Jones married Mary Ann Devereux, whose father was a 'painter' (most probably a decorator) in Portsea, and a copy of the marriage certificate of William Treadgold (son of John) on 10 October 1855 shows his wife to have been Elizabeth Johnson, daughter of George

*Painting of John Treadgold c.1850s.*
PCRO 1057A/1/123.

James Johnson, a bookseller in Reading.

Elizabeth was left as William's executor when he died in 1882, but this was in conjunction with a male family friend, John Guyatt, who was also manager of the business. It was unusual for women to be given trusteeship and then only if they were to act on behalf of their children, and it was also not the general practice for unmarried women to live independently.[51] Mary Kate Treadgold was left an orphan when her mother (John Jones Treadgold's widow) died in 1866 and although she already possessed income and property in trust from the family estate, she was sent to live with her grandfather in Queen's Road until he died. She then moved in with her aunt and uncle (Mary Ann Treadgold now married to Frederick Tilley) in London Road until she herself married in 1871.

Under the terms of William's will Elizabeth was left an annuity of £500 and the contents of 'Craneswater', the house in South Parade to which the family had moved in 1872. Thus it can be seen that by the 1880s the Treadgold family had built up an important level of social cohesion and unity. Through the analysis of marriage partners within the Treadgold family a pattern of fairly close-knit alliances in terms of occupation and economic status is indicated. Family relationships were further consolidated through a carefully planned system of inheritance. The Treadgold wills show that they tended to leave their wealth to all members of the family, the eldest males receiving the most, but the female members also receiving money in trust and properties. This type of inheritance required a relatively high level of residue, which could act as an added spur to the accumulation of wealth during an individual's lifetime and it also encouraged the participation of children in the family business, both as a way of enabling it to continue and in order to facilitate expansion.[52] This pattern can be seen clearly within the Treadgold family, each generation continuing in the ironmongery business and maintaining the ownership and further acquisition of property in Portsmouth.

John Treadgold's will highlights the problems of inheritance extremely well and an account of a lawsuit contesting his last will, which was brought before the Probate Court after his death on 29 May 1870, provides an insight into relationships within the Treadgold family. John's obituary in the local newspaper reads as a prosaic and unsentimental tribute to the family patriarch:

> TREADGOLD—on the evening of the 29th ult., at his residence, Queen's Road, Buckland, near Portsmouth, Mr John Treadgold, in the 82nd year of his age.[53]

However, there was certainly no lack of emotion at his death, as was to become apparent by the strong feeling engendered from a reading of his last will and testament. The division of his estate amongst his children and grandchildren would appear to be a straightforward matter, but a perusal of a report in the *Hampshire Telegraph*[54] on the five-day case brought before The Right Honourable Lord Penzance in London reveals a strong level of contention surrounding this will. The executors were William Treadgold, John's son, and Thomas Smith Edgecombe, the family solicitor and a personal friend of the deceased. The adversaries were John's two grandchildren by his eldest son, John Jones Treadgold (John George and Mary Kate) together with his two married daughters, Caroline Marvin and Mary Ann Tilley, who opposed the will 'on the ground that it was not duly executed, that the testator was not of sound mind, memory, and understanding, and that it was procured by the undue influence of the plaintiff William Treadgold'.[55]

Sir John Karslake, William's barrister, opened the case by outlining John Treadgold's activities as an ironmonger in Portsea. At his death he was worth over £20,000

personalty plus £4,000 in real estate.[56] The amount of property left in the will was considerable for a family of this background and it is apparent that the very importance of this underlies the case being brought concerning John's will. John had retired in 1856 and sold the business to his second son, William, for £500 for stock-in-trade, plus £2,500 for the bad debts, payable at £100 per quarter (final payment made on 25 March, 1863). This particular will under question was the last of several that John had made, one in 1849 witnessed by his son-in-law, Edwin Orlando Marvin, one in 1865 appointing William and Thomas Smith Edgecombe as executors, and a revised will in 1866, presumably altered due to the death of his wife, Mary Ann in 1865. It is this period between 1865 and the making of the last will in 1868 that is pivotal to the case, as it was maintained that it was partly because of the death of his wife that John Treadgold began to deteriorate in both physical and mental health. It is interesting that the evidence makes reference to the fact that John 'had been so bothered by the women that he should make another [will]'.[57] Presumably this refers to his two daughters and it is possible to debate who was bringing 'undue influence' to bear on John, his son or his daughters.

Mr Cole, for the defendants' solicitors, stated that he had attended John Treadgold to make alterations to his last will and had advised against reducing the amounts to be left to the daughters and grandchildren.

| | **1866 Will** | **1868 Will** |
|---|---|---|
| William Treadgold | £6,760 | £9,480 |
| Mrs Marvin | £6,200 | £6,200 |
| Mrs Tilley | £6,760 | £6,200 |
| George Treadgold | £2,500 | £2,000 |
| Kate Treadgold | £3,200 | £2,700 |
| servant | £200 | £200 [58] |

There is an indication that the grandson, John George, may have been somewhat feckless, as John had commented to Mr Cole that 25 was 'soon enough for him [John George] to take it, and he would soon lose or spend it'. He may also have reduced the amount to the grandchildren because they already had a legacy under the will of their great-uncle, William, who had died in 1819 leaving no children. However, there is nothing to explain why the amount of money left to his youngest daughter, Mary Ann Tilley, had decreased by £560.

A note of levity entered the proceedings when reference was made to a Mrs Rothery of the *Blue Anchor* public house in Kingston, who may have been 'setting her cap at him [John]',[59] a situation he wanted to avoid! The plaintiffs started their case with the evidence of Mrs Mary Ann Tilley, who stated that her father had become gradually enfeebled in mind and body after his fall in 1863, exacerbated by the death of his wife in 1865. He refused to attend her funeral, but it is not clear if this is because of emotional feelings on his part or perverseness stemming from mental instability. The Tilley family lived at 48 London Road, Kingston, fairly close to John Treadgold's house in Buckland, and were frequent visitors there. Mrs Tilley continued with various facts highlighting her father's deteriorating mental state, confirmed by her sister, Mrs Caroline Marvin, when she gave her evidence. The family servant, Ann Carter (who had been employed since 1829) corroborated the sisters' evidence, as did Mary Kate, John's granddaughter. Both sons-in-law gave evidence, stating that John Treadgold was not fit to manage money matters after about 1866 and that they had paid the interest due on their loans from him to William, who had taken over most business activities. There does seem to be some vested interest here; both Edwin Marvin and Frederick Tilley were local businessmen, the former an upholsterer with a shop in Camden Alley and the latter a soap boiler with premises in Prospect Row (owned by John Treadgold), both of whom would obviously benefit from a sizeable legacy and who were also beholden financially to John Treadgold to some extent.

Much of the evidence given can be explained as the not unusual actions of an elderly gentleman: forgetfulness, ramblings about the past, the need to be accompanied by his gardener because of his physical weakness, childish jocularity, talk of loneliness, excitability, and frequent tears. The judge, Lord Penzance, in his summing up of the case, asserted that much of the evidence given by the defendants was exaggerated and possibly inaccurate in terms of exact time. Evidence from account books refuted allegations that he could not manage his business affairs, at least up to 1869, and that serious failing of John Treadgold's mind appears to have occurred only after an illness in November 1869, well after the time that the final will was made. The judgment was therefore made to uphold the will made on 21 May 1868, Lord Penzance stating that 'If this will had never been made, a great deal of bad feeling would not have been engendered, and this litigation would never have been begun'.[60] Whilst this is obviously true, it could also be said that such bad feelings already existed within the Treadgold family and underlies the tensions that were created through a tradition of inheritance and perhaps inflated ambition. The question that arises from this case centres on the identification of John Treadgold in terms of his status as either a remarkable and distinguished member of the society in which he lived, or as a peculiar and eccentric person. To some extent this contradiction seems to have been exploited by members of the Treadgold family for their own particular

*Photograph of William Treadgold c.1860s.*
PCRO 1057A/1/123.

interests, providing a useful insight into the relationships between family and business.

In summary, it can be seen that business and property arrangements based on such a familial structure allowed a high level of flexibility and ensured the continuation of established business concerns, as well as efficiently absorbing the needs and demands of competing offspring. The marriage of daughters could either free the family resources from the need to support them, or enable additional males to enter the business if there were no sons, or sons interested in other pursuits. It is fortunate in the case of William Treadgold that he left sufficient in his estate to support, perhaps surprisingly, four unmarried daughters.

Had he lived longer, it is most probable that he would have brought his nephew, John George, into partnership in the Treadgold business in place of his two sons, who both had careers in the army[61] and were only involved in the business as directors and shareholders. Kelly's directory of 1879 lists George Treadgold as a shopkeeper at 36 College Street, but no further trace of him could be found.

It was the containment of the Treadgold family and business in the locality of Portsmouth which, whilst creating its own limitations, also provided an element of safety and strength, protecting it from many of the financial hazards experienced at a wider level. John Treadgold was obviously an astute businessman with a strong entrepreneurial spirit, who built up his wealth and security through the acquisition of land and property, careful investment in local concerns, and the expansion of the business, leaving him in a position to enjoy his later years well away from the foetid streets of Portsea. His son, William, developed the opportunities left him, thus enabling him to establish himself as a respectable figure in the Southsea middle classes of the 1870s.

**Treadgolds and the community**

The role of the Treadgold family within the Portsea community has a far-reaching history stemming from the late eighteenth century. Interestingly, although the importance of their influence was initially in a very direct manner, as will be shown, it was later much less obvious and manifested more in their activities as landlords and businessmen than in any involvement with the community itself on an authoritarian level. There is no evidence to show that the Treadgold family had any direct power in local government during the nineteenth century, as was often the case with well-established businessmen, although their membership of some local societies and participation in certain investment schemes point to their inclusion with a group of Portsmouth tradesmen and professionals who formed an important middle-class élite.

The first record of the Treadgolds' activities within the Portsea community is revealed in the diary of William Treadgold (the elder), dating from 1794[62], which contains details of his role as beadle to the Trustees of the Portsea Improvement Commissioners. Established under a parliamentary act of 1764, the Commissioners were responsible for regulating the erection and maintenance of buildings and the laying of pavements, as well as preventing 'nuisances and other annoyances', such as by the removal of soil and sewage from the streets and obstructions on the pavements. The Commissioners consisted of a body of local Portsea men, and the beadle was responsible for reporting back on a day-to-day basis about relevant matters in the town. Qualification to act as a Trustee to the Commissioners was ownership of an estate worth £600, or of land worth £40 a year in Portsea and £20 a year in Portsmouth.[63] Such criteria for membership are indicative of a need for a reasonably high level of wealth, thereby limiting it to a small and most probably well-established

group of local tradesmen and professionals. Extracts from the 1843 minutes show that they held their meetings monthly at the *Ship and Castle Tavern*, then in later years at *The Athenaeum* in Bishop Street. The Commissioners carried out an ever-widening administrative role in Portsea's development and pre-empted the Municipal Acts of 1835 by some seventy years. Whilst they did not have the powers of later municipal authorities, they established a framework for the implementation of building regulations and of public services which facilitated the expansion of local government powers during the course of the nineteenth century.

On 12 August 1794, William Treadgold (the elder) was appointed beadle, surveyor and measurer to the Trustees of the Portsea Improvement Commissioners[64]. William's son John was elected as a Trustee to the Commissioners in 1832, re-elected in 1834 and 1836, then appointed as a superintendent in 1837. His son, William, was elected in 1843, a significant continuity of membership in one family. The first William's role as surveyor provided him not only with influence in the community in his capacity as a beadle, but endowed him with a specific form of personal power. For example, an extract from the diary dated 8 September 1794:

> I was directed by Mr Gaselee to say to Messrs Bailey & Elliott that if they or their servants took up any pavements without my survey and order, they should not be paid for same neither would such work be measured by the surveyor .....

It is known from other records that Stephen Gaselee was a solicitor and various extracts from the diary referring to the company of Messrs Gaselee and Gillam indicate that they were probably employed by the Trustees in cases where it was necessary to enforce their instructions for the removal of obstructions or nuisances, or in any construction work such as re-paving or alterations to buildings.

Further extracts from the diary reveal the increasing power and influence of the Trustees in the control of Portsea and its development. It was decided at a meeting of the Trustees on 10 September 1794 that all orders should be given to the Commissioners' surveyor (William Treadgold) and that the contractor could not carry out any work without a survey or the surveyor's orders. This obviously would have enabled the surveyor to favour certain contractors as well as have the authority to make necessary decisions about works to be carried out. Another sphere of influence can be seen from an entry dated 9 October 1794 where a Mr Read of *The Royal Oak* public house complained that the rating of his premises at £40 a year was excessive. The case was brought before Sir John Carter at the Quarter Sessions and what is significant is the evidence of William Treadgold to the effect that he considered the rateable value of the whole property 'to be worth not less than 46 pounds per year .....' revealing his role in the valuation of property as part of his duties.

The back of the diary contains numerous accounts for parcels of land purchased outside the boundaries of Portsea, such as Town Field and Cherry Garden Field.[65] The transactions, taking place between 1815 and 1817, appear to have been negotiated through an agent, a Mr Blanchard, and as well as the purchase of land, William Treadgold appears to have loaned money to others for the same purposes as many of the accounts are under the names of individuals with details of periodic payments.

The *Tithe Map Book of Reference*, dated 1838, records that William's son, John Treadgold, continued this tradition by also purchasing areas of land in Landport.

> John Treadgold
> occupied by Thomas Noble
> Garden 2 rod 2 perches (Landport)
>
> occupied by Joseph Lansbury
> Garden 1 rod 1 perch (Landport)
>
> occupied by Ambrose Bucksey
> Garden 1 acre 1 rod 7 perches
> (off Blackfriars Road, Landport)
>
> occupied by Charles Marshall
> Garden 37 perches (off Mary's Road, Landport)
>
> occupied by John Keminski Jnr.
> Garden 1 rod 5 perch (Mary's Road, Landport)[66]

An analysis of the Poor Rates Books for the early nineteenth century discloses the level of property owned by the Treadgold family in Portsea. In 1796 William Treadgold (the elder) owned Threadgould's Court[67] in Old Rope Walk (now Kent Street), consisting of ten tenement houses. William himself lived firstly in St James' s Street, valued in 1815 at £14 7*s*. 0*d*., and later in Union Street, valued in 1829 at £10 5*s*. 0*d*., until he died in 1833. The Poor Rates Books from 1838 list for the first time the owners of property, as opposed to only the occupants, and it is therefore possible to detail fully the properties owned by the Treadgold family at this time. In total John Treadgold owned twenty-four houses, one shop, two stores and one stable in Portsea.

The location of the Treadgold properties for their own use was fairly widespread in Portsea. A pattern of 'upward mobility' can be traced where the family itself lived; John moved from Bishop Street to a house at 11 Lion Terrace in 1851,[68] then on to St George's Square, and finally to a house in Queen's Road, Buckland in 1863.[69] His son William had married in 1855 and is listed in Kelly's directory for this year as living at 355 Commercial Road in property then

*Survey plan of Common Fields.*
760A/1/1.

owned by his father. From the rateable value it can be ascertained that this was a larger and more prestigious house than the property in Bishop Street. William's progress in terms of relative wealth and social status is also shown from the 1861 Census Enumerator's Returns:

**355 Commercial Road**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| William Treadgold | age 46 | Iron Merchant and landowner |
| Elizabeth Treadgold | age 36 | born Berkshire |
| Mabel Winifred | age 11 | scholar (d.) |
| Beatrice Helen | age 9 | scholar (d.) |
| William Lancelot | age 8 | scholar (s.) |
| John Aubrey Temple | age 2 | son |
| Ellen Johnson (unmarried) | age 35 | sister-in-law |
| Catherine Mutrugold | age 31 | Cook/hskpr. |
| Anna Fow (unmarried) | age 40 | Nurse |
| Eliza Rogers | age 23 | Nurse |
| Mary King (unmarried) | age 21 | Housemaid[70] |

From an analysis of servant-keeping in similar size households in this particular area, it is obvious that the listing of four servants was somewhat unusual, thereby indicating not only the social cachet attached to the number of servants kept but that by this time William and his family were obviously very much a part of the respectable middle classes in Portsmouth. In 1872 he moved with his family to 'Craneswater', a large house opposite Canoe Lake in Southsea. This was sold in 1902 for £10,000,[71] a clear indication that William had come a long way from his roots in Portsea.

Further evidence of the Treadgolds' social status is provided from details of property ownership and investment contained in the Family Capital Account Ledger, dated 1870-1917.[72] All the following properties were leased out to tenants:

44-49 Queen Street
291-93, 353-359, 363-369 Commercial Road
200 Fratton Road
East Street
10 King Street
11/12 Blossom Alley
10 Kent Place

These properties were mostly rented by small traders and retailers, such as grocers, butchers, dressmakers and watchmakers, although two of the properties in Commercial Road were leased by surgeons. They also held mortgages on 94 properties in all areas of Portsmouth, as well as in Gosport, West Sussex and Wickham. Some of the mortgages were held by individual members of the family, so that the interest was payable to them and not to the company. Most of the properties were sold in 1902 when Mrs Elizabeth Tredgold died and the four Tredgold daughters moved to London. The company continued to own the five properties in Queen Street, but these were also eventually sold as they became increasingly in need of repair and maintenance and therefore less profitable. This level of property ownership and mortgage holding was quite substantial and it is clear that a sound financial base was necessary for this type of enterprise. This was provided by the ironmongery business as well as from the astute subscription to secure forms of financial investment.

Investment in local enterprises had always played an important part in the Treadgolds' activities. An analysis of the accounts for 1869 shows the total of the Tenants and Mortgage Account to be £1,119 5*s*. 11*d*. and the Property and Investment Account to be £30,559 17*s*. 6*d*., a considerable sum of money and certainly more than the business turnover; the Trading Account for the same year being £13,536 8*s*. 10*d*. The Family Capital Account Ledger details family share holdings in local concerns, such as the Girls' Public Day School in Southsea;[73] the Clarence Esplanade Pier Company; the Portsmouth Tramway Company; the Ryde Steam Company; and Portsmouth Water Works Company. One important investment was in the Portsmouth Harbour Pier Company, which was established under a parliamentary contract on 26 June 1846:

> For making a pier from the common hard, at the eastern or Portsmouth side of the harbour of Portsmouth, in the parish of Portsea, in the County of Southampton.[74]

A new pier was needed to replace the existing wharf, which had been incorporated into the dockyard when it was extended in 1845. The cost of shares ranged from as little as £10 up to £250 (John Treadgold's share was £250) and the shareholders were almost all Portsea men, mostly in trade and retailing, but also included three solicitors, three 'gentlemen', a banker, one doctor of medicine, a navy agent and a 'mathematical master' from the Royal Naval College. William Treadgold (John's son) was secretary of the company and its registered offices were at 51 Bishop Street (the Treadgold business premises). The pier was a succesful venture until 1873 when the London and South-Western Railway Company and the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway Company extended their joint line to Portsmouth Harbour. They bought out the Pier Company and on 3 May 1875 William sent a notice to all shareholders asking them to attend a meeting at the registered offices in order to receive payment for their shares and the company was wound up.[75] It is interesting to note that

*Lord Mayor's chain and badge 1859 and 1887.*
From Civic Pride and Sterling Silver (Portsmouth, 1988)

twenty-six of the Trustees to the Portsea Improvement Commissioners were also listed as shareholders in the Portsmouth Harbour Pier Company, supporting the premise that there was a core group of citizens involved in particular aspects of the Portsea community.

Another salient area of community status was found in membership of the Beneficial Society, founded in 1754 as a charitable organization along the lines of a friendly society, although it was never registered as one. The founder members included a merchant, an apothecary, a brewer, a grocer, a carpenter, a draper, a builder and an ironmonger.[76] Admission was granted to 'any Tradesman or substantial House-keeper of Sober Life'[77] who could pay a sum of money into the society's fund on a regular basis, but new members also had to be vetted by existing members for their suitability. Honorary membership was open to any lady[78] or gentleman wishing to provide regular contributions to the society but not wishing to be covered by its welfare provisions or to accept a position of responsibility in the society. William Treadgold (the younger) became an honorary member on 2 March 1818, but died on 10 June in the same year. His brother, John, became an honorary member in 1833, followed by his son William in 1854 together with the latter's brothers-in-law, Frederick Tilley and Edwin Marvin. Honorary membership undoubtedly endowed social prestige as membership implied respectability and status.

William Treadgold was also a subscriber to the Royal Portsmouth, Portsea and Gosport Hospital, instituted in 1846 and opened on 2 January 1849. Under the list of subscribers from 1849-59 is John Treadgold at £1 1*s*. 0*d*. and William Treadgold from 1853 at the same rate[79]. From a scrutiny of the names of other subscribers, thirty-four are the same local people who were shareholders of the Portsmouth Harbour Pier Company and some of the same names again appear in the list of Commissioners for the Portsea Improvement Commissioners. Further investigation, from *The Extracts of the Portsmouth Records*,[80] show that in 1866 many of the same names appear in the list of local councillors, such as Henry Ford, solicitor; Richard Marvin, auctioneer; George Absalom, builder; John Friend Pratt, merchant; and Frederick Tilley, soap boiler (later to marry Mary Ann Treadgold). In 1859, the Mayor, Henry Ford, was presented with a chain of office which had been provided by public subscription. The badge contained the following inscription:

> Purchased by subscription amongst the burgesses, and presented to the Worshipful the Mayor and the Corporation of the borough during the Mayoralty of Henry Ford, Esq. under a committee composed of C. Crassweller, Esq. (Chairman), Mr Alderman Orange, Mr W.O. Marshall, Mr E.M. Frost, Mr H.D. Davey, Mr E.M. Wells, Mr L.A. Vandenburgh, Mr G. Rake, Mr W. Treadgold, Mr G. Long, Mr Dudley, Mr William D. King (Hon. Sec.).[81]

By outlining the areas of local investment and property ownership, it is very evident that the Treadgold family gained a large degree of their wealth and social position through the acquisition of land and property, the former as an astute investment in the future development of Portsea as its population overspilled into neighbouring districts. Whilst this indicates fairly obvious elements of self-interest, the point to be made is that it was the property-owning and investment activities of such local families as the Treadgolds which contributed to the scale of development in Portsea during the nineteenth century. Their sense of individual responsibility to the community is best summarised through a clause in William Treadgold's will, which provides that the executors of the will use an investment of £150,

> ... upon trust to pay and distribute the dividends thereof in coals, bread and money, yearly on the twenty first day of December among twenty poor persons who shall not be in receipt of parochial relief and who shall produce a testimonial of their character from their landlord of their sobriety and industry and in their punctuality in paying their rents ...[82]

The latter clause indicating that a generous spirit did not take precendence over a sense of business!

**Conclusion**

The importance of studying a business like that of Treadgolds is to understand how such companies developed and maintained their customer relations and how they continued in a tradition which had its roots in a form of retailing that had largely become obsolete by the mid-twentieth century. Its continuance was in part due to a need for very localised, individual suppliers, who provided limited forms of credit, a personal delivery service and a stock of specialised items. It is obvious from the records that over the years Treadgolds had built up a good reputation with its customers and a consistency in its level of trading. However, with the premature death of William Treadgold and the lack of direct involvement in the business by the surviving family, it is clear that the entrepreneurial spirit which had existed during the nineteenth century was no longer present to channel the business into new directions in line with a changing market. During the twentieth century the business was swept along by a momentum which relied on an established and widespread reputation and a style of employment that invoked loyalty from its workers.

The analysis also looks at the significance of such continuities in the accompanying development of the Portsea neighbourhood and how a family such as the Treadgolds used their income to generate land and housing expansion through loans and investments. As individuals, they would have viewed income from property simply as the best investment for their money at the time, but in the absence of a large and well-established middle class group in Portsmouth,[83] as in other industrial towns of the period, it was the small producers, traders and retailers, such as the Treadgolds, who provided the capital and entrepreneurship necessary for urban development and expansion. The élite of Portsmouth and Southsea clustered around a transient naval circle, with few very wealthy businessmen or industrialists. This was related to the presence and control of the dockyard, so although a strong industrial middle class did not develop, this allowed a niche for a lower level of small businessmen and investors, such as the Treadgolds, who could dominate the local seats of power. Even though the Treadgolds themselves did not in general take advantage of this situation, the people with whom they associated were prominent in the running of the town at local government level and many of the co-investors in the Portsmouth Harbour Pier Company and other such enterprises, went on to become councillors and at least two of them became mayors. Although Treadgolds was only a small ironmongers in relative terms, its history provides an important insight not only into retailing practices of the period, but also the much wider context of Portsea, its geographical development, its economic structure and its community relations.

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The Treadgold site is the property of Hampshire County Council and run by the Hampshire Museums Service. It is currently open to the public until the end of September (Thursday and Friday 10-4). Pre-booked parties and school groups are welcome through-out the year (telephone enquiries 01705 824745).

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Ann Day entered higher education as a mature student on the Highbury Access course in 1987. After successful completion she undertook a BA (Hons) degree in Historical Studies, graduating in 1991. This was followed by a two-year M.Phil. degree researching the Treadgold family and business, which she now hopes to convert to a Ph.D. She is currently employed as a research assistant at the University of Portsmouth.


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[18] PCRO, 1057A/1/46.

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[44] PCRO, 1057A/1/20.

[45] Although none of the interviewees remembers these being used, it is most probable that they were originally connected with the shop, the forge and the warehouse (the latter on the opposite side of Bishop Street).

[46] Oral interview conducted with Mr and Mrs Jefferis on 30 January 1992.

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[48] Conversation held at the Treadgold Exhibition on 17 October 1992.

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[54] *HT*, 21 January 1871.

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[56] In his article 'Wealth, styles of life and social tone amongst Portsmouth's middle class, 1800-1875' in R.J. Morris (ed.), *Class, Power and Social Structure in British Nineteenth Century Towns* (Leics. University Press, 1986), John Field discusses scales of wealth based on an analysis of wills. Thomas Jackson, a local staymaker, left a personalty of £30,000 and Captain Basil Hall RN, £10,000. This gives an idea of John Treadgold's level of wealth at the time of his death.

[57] *HT*, 25 January 1871.

[58] *HT*, 25 Janaury 1871.

[59] *HT*, 25 Janaury 1871.

[60] *HT*, 28 Janaury 1871.

[61] William Lancelot Treadgold was a lieutenant in the West India Regiment in 1892, receiving his captaincy in 1899 and retiring after the Boer War in 1902, with the rank of major. His younger brother, John Aubrey Temple Tredgold, was a second lieutenant in the Leicestershire Regiment and served in South Africa as a captain in 1902.

[62] PCRO, 1026A/1/2 - William Treadgold's diary for 1794-96.

[63] PCRO, G/ICP 118.

[64] PCRO, G/ICP 1/8.

[65] Cherry Garden Field was also known as Metland, Maitland or Mateland Field and was situated on the east side of Commercial Road, extending from Lake Lane (now Lake Road) to the south, Elm Lane to the north and in part running through to Kingston Road. Town Field was also known as Mere Field and it was farmed up to 1750 and often owned jointly although ownership was restricted to individual furlongs and rods. It was also situated in what is now known as the Landport area.

[66] PCRO, Tithe Map Book of Reference, 1838.

[67] There are various spellings of the Treadgold name in the Poor Rates Books, which was not unusual at this time.

[68] 1851 Census Returns, Portsmouth Central Library.

[69] In 1863 John Treadgold had a house built in Queen's Road, Buckland, on a piece of land given to him by Sergeant Gaselee, for whom he had acted as a property agent in the Portsmouth area. This same Sergeant Gaselee was also heavily involved in the Portsmouth Harbour Pier Company and

owned property in Portsea, as well as areas of land in Landport.

[70] 1861 Census Returns, Portsmouth Central Library.

[71] The house was sold to Sir William Dupree (from the local brewing family) who later became mayor of Portsmouth.

[72] PCRO, 1057A/1/34.

[73] It is possible that the four Treadgold daughters were educated at this school.

[74] Portsmouth Harbour Pier Act 1846 (9/10 Vict.c.cviii).

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[80] R.J. Murrell and R. East, *Extracts from the Portsmouth Records* (Portsmouth, 1884).

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